

A Vietnamese Interview

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Vietnam is a country that the United States knows all too well. Barbi Vu and her family are Vietnamese people who have experienced life in both countries. She has been through a lot of events in her life, and I was lucky enough to interview such an interesting woman. You would never believe the differences there are between the Philippines and Vietnam on the one hand and the United States on the other.

Barbi Vu, her six brothers and sisters, two aunts, and her mother and father all immigrated to the United States from the Philippines on April 4, 1975. "We traveled on a boat until we reached the refugee camp which was the INS (Immigrant National Security) on the Guam Islands." Barbi and her family waited for about two months at the refugee camp. "We slept in a small tent placed in the camp waiting to be brought into America." Finally, Barbi's dream came true when the St. Andrews church located in Rock Falls, Illinois, said it would be delighted to sponsor such a wonderful family. Although it was rough on the town, they all supported the family's move to Rock Falls. The church did not have a lot of money, but they saw to it that the family would have a house to turn to and that Barbi's father would have a job to rely on. The church also gave essential needs to the whole family, such as money, food, and clothing. They were placed in a low-income government apartment building, and the family did not have a problem with that because they were happy to be in America after waiting so long.

The main reason for the Vu family moving to America was to get away from the communists trying to take over their country. They knew that the United States was a good place

to move to because of all the freedoms it has. Vietnamese people had their freedom taken away from them because of the North overthrowing the South. That is when a big war started and the guards had to evacuate the South. Barbi said, "I remember when I was seven years old and I was sitting in class at the St. Daminakin sisters schooling and all of a sudden I heard a big boom. Then I looked out the window and the American Embassy was getting bombed by the communists. I was so scared and all I thought about was getting my butt into that bombshell before the guards shoot at me too."

There were differences between the two countries. For example, in the Philippines they start their schooling at the age of three. "The United States of America was beautiful compared to Vietnam." Her country was poor, war-torn, and more middle-class people living in it rather than rich people. The rich people in Vietnam are very similar to the middle-class people living in America. For example, the rich Vietnamese people had electricity and plumbing. Barbi was puzzled when she heard of the kind of schooling in America. There was a vast difference in the grading levels. In Vietnam there is no middle school, only two separate buildings for grade school and a high school building.

A Vietnamese tradition is that on New Year's Day families celebrate all birthdays. Money is usually the present received.

Barbi Vu and her family became citizens of America after living here for about a year. They had to take a test and be sworn in. Her parents had to speak in front of the judge in a Supreme Court. Barbi told me, "I became a citizen of the United States automatically because I was only the age of seven at that time."

As you can see Vietnam is an interesting country. I have learned many remarkable facts about their traditions and culture. Now Barbi Vu and her family have experienced several sides

of the world even though all experiences were not good. That is one reason why America is such an amazing place filled with freedom and opportunity.

[From student historian's interview with Barbi Vu, Sept. 22, Sept. 23, and Sept. 24, 2002.]